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| ***Warning: The content of this paper includes topics that may be difficult for some people to confront or discuss.*** |

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A brief perusal of media coverage on "true crime" today may well leave one convinced, as I was when I first dived deep into it in early 2018, that the genre has experienced something of a cultural renaissance in the last five years. On April 29th, 2019, *Variety* magazine published an article titled, "Inside the True Crime Boom Taking Over Prestige TV." I mention this article not because it is particularly convincing; the writer credits *American Crime Story: OJ Simpson*, the first season of Netflix's true crime anthology series which debuted in 2016, for the recent rise of interest in true crime, even though the resurgence of the genre can be traced back at least to 2014's *Serial*. The article is, however, representative of the broader cultural feeling about true crime shared by a great number of readers and critics today. The title captures what many have perceived to be the two major developments in the genre's recent history that together constitute its renaissance. The first of these is the genre's seemingly rapid rise in popularity as of late, as illustrated by the writer's reference to the so-called "true crime boom," a phrase that has gained currency over the past few years in popular writing about contemporary true crime. The second and arguably more contestable development, suggested by true crime's alleged takeover of "prestige TV," is the general feeling among observers that true crime has become more sophisticated in recent years and has itself acquired a degree of prestige in contemporary society. In this view, offerings such as 2014's *Serial* and 2015's *Making a Murderer* have elevated a genre previously dismissed as "lowbrow" and "popular" to the ranks of high culture. True crime has become, in a word, respectable. For the lifelong student of popular culture and occasional student of cultural studies, three questions naturally arise: are we really in a true crime boom, is it really the case that true crime has gone highbrow, and, if the answer to the first two questions is yes, then why now?

It would be hard to deny that true crime has experienced a boom in recent years. The "post-*Serial* true crime boom" (as another common collocation has it) saw a revival of interest in the genre. True crime podcasts proliferated in the mid-2010s, from which emerged such fan favorites as *My Favorite Murder* (2016–present) and *S-Town* (2017). Streaming media services have shown no signs of slowing down their true crime output following the success of 2015's *Making a Murderer* and other true crime docuseries, and why would they? A third-party poll found that more than 19 million viewers on average streamed season one of *Making a Murderer* within thirty-five days of its December 2015 release (*Adweek.com*, 2016). Not surprisingly, Netflix is set to release four new true crime Netflix Original Documentaries in June 2019 alone (*Shortlist.com*, 2019). With all the evidence out there, it is getting

harder and harder to maintain that true crime is not in the midst of something resembling a boom (a moment, maybe?). Even those who initially balked at the idea of a "true crime boom" have had to concede that something noteworthy is happening. Writing for CrimeReads.com earlier this year, host of the podcast *Criminal Broads* and "Lady Killer" expert Tori Tefler admitted that although the true crime business has always "hummed," "[w]e are clearly in the midst—or at the peak?—of a very specific sort of true crime boom that was midwifed into being with "prestige" true crime like *Serial* and *Making a Murderer* and *The Jinx*." Here, again, the causal link is established between the genre's rise in popularity and its perceived newfound prestige. The underlying logic of this argument seems to run as follows: True crime was previously a lowbrow form of popular art that fed the uneducated public's insatiable appetite for lurid and sensational tales of violence, but recently the genre has become more intellectually-engaging, sophisticated, and respectable in both content and form, and we are witnessing a rise in the genre's popularity *because* of this change in overall quality. This view is problematic (not to mention contradictory) for several reasons, not least because it assumes that a distinction between high and popular culture exists by which cultural products such as the true crime story can be categorized.

In an essay titled "What is Popular Culture?," cultural critic John Storey sketches out five conceptual understandings of the phrase "popular culture" in current general and critical usage. The current praise of "the rise of highbrow true crime" seems to rest upon Storey's second definition, which views popular culture as occupying the subordinate position within a binary structure. In this definition, popular culture is

> the culture which is left over after we have decided what is high culture … a residual category, there to accommodate cultural texts and practices which fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture. In other words, it is a definition of popular culture as inferior culture.
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Popular culture is thus defined in negative relation to high culture. In this Arnoldian tradition, high culture encompasses "all the best that has been thought and said" by a society, while popular culture is made up of all works that have been deemed to lack the qualities of high art. This division between high and low culture is used, mainly but not exclusively, by members of the cultural elite to police boundaries between supposedly superior and inferior forms of cultural production. Such distinctions presume that the standards of cultural taste are universal (stable across human experience) as well as trans-historical (fixed for all time). One unfortunate legacy of this perspective was the exclusion of popular art as a worthy site of cultural study.

Cultural critics such as Storey have long rejected the binary structure upon which the division between a high and low culture rests, insisting that the cultural tastes of any day are socially constructed, locally and temporally contingent, and, as a result, always open to contestation. Consequently, there can be no universal or trans-historically fixed criteria by which to categorize cultural products as either good or bad or high or low. This critical perspective has had two lasting legacies. First, this view rendered evaluation of cultural products based on aesthetic quality a highly untenable task. How can you definitively judge whether a work of art is good or bad or high or low when there are no legitimate grounds upon which to base aesthetic judgements? With a void left by the death of aesthetic judgement, cultural critics now shifted their critical gaze to issues of ideology, representation, and the cultural production of meaning in the analysis of culture. Second, by rejecting low/high culture distinctions, cultural critics effectively legitimized popular culture as a site worthy of critical and cultural inquiry. As Barker and Jane explain, "this stance had the great merit of opening up a whole new array of texts for legitimate discussion" (53). In the decades following the emergence of British cultural studies, scholars would take up popular art forms ranging from rock and roll to blackface minstrelsy as legitimate objects of cultural concern.

When looking at contemporary true crime through a cultural studies lens, it becomes clear that something is different about the genre. I would argue that the quality of true crime has changed, but not in the high culture, low culture sense which finds popular expression today in readily available phrases such as "prestige true crime" or "highbrow true crime." Rather, some of the newer entries in the genre suggest that true crime is undergoing something more resembling an ideological shift towards

the *left*. True crime has a long history of affirming conservative notions of justice, even when it has been subversive[1]. Yet, more true crime today is beginning to focus on and advocate for those who may have been wronged by the criminal justice system. *Serial* and *Making a Murderer* are indicative of this trend. The true crime storytellers of today, it seems to me, are setting out with other social and political purposes in mind. So, while I agree with the general feeling that the quality of true crime has changed, I do not believe that it has changed in terms of aesthetic quality (i.e. highbrow true crime) but rather in terms of social and political ideology.

Returning to the question of whether we are currently in the midst of a true crime boom, Tefler gives us good reason to curb our enthusiasm about what many have perceived to be the exceptional rise of true crime in recent years. She writes:

> Today, we're in a true crime boom because we're in an everything boom. We are drowning in content these days: with an Xfinity subscription, a Hulu login filched from your kid cousin, and a bit of honest American God-given laziness, you can literally "stream content" until you die. Is there a lot of true crime content floating around these days? Yes, just like there are a lot of music videos and Gossip Girl knock-offs and stand-up specials floating around these days, not to mention so many original Netflix shows that they've been mocked on SNL. And I'm not even going to mention the podcasts again.

Tefler makes a convincing case that perhaps the true crime boom is not so exceptional, after all. In the internet age, anyone with access can find endless entertainment to fill whatever their heart desires. If you love cooking shows, a quick internet browse will pull up tens (if not hundreds) of shows to watch, multiple social media fan groups to join, and any number of celebrity chefs to follow. We have seen the proliferation of not only true crime content, but *all* content. Nevertheless, we are still very much in a true crime moment, and just because everything else is booming, too, does not mean that we are prohibited from looking at the particular forces that have propelled the recent rise of true crime.

If we accept that we are in a true crime moment and that, as I argue, the social and political motives of true crime have started to change, the question then becomes: why now? Tefler's point that we are in an "everything-boom" provides a general starting point, but what is it that has fueled true crime's boom in particular? What circumstances have led the genre to shift ideologically? On the rise of what she dubbed, in a 2015 article for *The Atlantic*, "The New True Crime," Lenika Cruz offers one take when she writes that "[n]ew forces—improved technology, new media, and less trust in institutions—have helped shaped true crime into a truly modern form." There is certainly truth to her claims. As both Tefler and Cruz would agree, increased connectivity and new media forms have undeniably helped shape the true crime moment in which we are currently living. This fact is perhaps no more apparent than when looking at the *Serial* phenomenon. The unprecedented success of *Serial*'s first season demonstrated that the podcast, as both a technology and a new media format, is singularly effective for an incisive study of the violent crime, its precipitating events, and its juridical aftermath. With *Serial*, the podcast's viral capability, combined with the creative affordances of the format, came together to offer an infinitely shareable, easily digestible, and thrilling way to consume true crime stories. To put true crime's natural affinity with the podcast in perspective, *Serial* currently holds the distinction of being the fastest podcast to reach 5 million downloads and streams in iTunes history (*The Guardian*, 2014) and remains the most popular podcast to date. In the post-*Serial* true crime boom that followed, the podcast experienced a stellar rise as the medium of choice for both true crime storytellers and listeners alike. Similarly, streaming media services have widened the genre's reach by offering audiences around the world binge-able and (for the most part) smartly-conceived stories of crime, such as *Making a Murderer* (2015–present) and HBO's *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst* (2015). Both shows were met with general acclaim and have received

1 Laura Browder (2010) writes that true crime books often "uphold conservative values—policemen are heroes, criminals are punished, sometimes by death … some of the most successful writers who followed [Capote] have framed their stories as morality tales … Yet true crime books are also subversive, in that they tend to question the very foundations of patriarchal culture" (126).

multiple accolades. It's also worth noting that while new technology and new media have perhaps played the largest role in re-invigorating the genre, true crime has also continued to be immensely popular in print form, as made clear by the success of recent books like David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (2017) and Michelle McNamara's *I'll Be Gone in the Dark: One Woman's Search for the Golden State Killer* (2018). A film adaptation of *Killers* is currently in development with Martin Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio at the helm, if that's any indicator of the genre's continued relevance in U.S. culture.

Social media has also contributed to the true crime moment by allowing ever greater participation among showrunners, investigative journalists, local and federal authorities involved in particular cases, the families and friends of victims, and fans-turned-amateur-sleuths. In some cases, such "crowdsolving," as it has sometimes been called, has led to breakthroughs in investigations or court trials. News articles with the headlines reading something like "How a true crime podcast helped solve a 30-something-year old cold case" or "How Social Media Helped Solve a Murder" have become a regular occurrence. Just recently, a story broke reporting how listeners of journalist Hedley Thomas' podcast "The Teacher's Pet" helped solve a 36-year-old cold case in Australia (*NPR*, 2018). Though it remains to some degree a fringe internet sub-culture, web-sleuthing is alive and well during the true crime boom, and social media has played a central role in maintaining this subculture. Furthermore, outlets such as Facebook and Reddit have created new digital spaces for fans to trade theories, advocate for justice, provide tips and information, and fuel the fandom. A look at the numbers is revealing. As of this writing, 527,758 people have liked the "Making a Murderer" Facebook page; 446,558 have liked "Serial." The subreddit r/True Crime has 87,822 subscribers, r/serialpodcast has 60,885, and r/makingamurderer has 73,800. These spaces have acted as incubators for true crime. As Cruz explains, "[s]ocial media supports the quick ascendance of particular stories, allowing a grassroots energy to buoy otherwise niche cases to the top of the trending list." In effect, social media has made true crime at once more participatory and more viral.

Cruz's claim that a mistrust of institutions has helped shape contemporary true crime helps us to move beyond the tech and media-based arguments often given as reasons for the current true crime boom to look at how wider cultural shifts in the arena of politics and ideology have influenced the genre. People have become more skeptical about the institutions that are meant to serve and protect them, and their interest in such shows as *Serial* and *Making a Murderer*, which both focus on the possibility of wrongful conviction and imprisonment, reflect the profound skepticism of institutions that has emerged in contemporary society. What's more, contemporary true crime has on several occasions demonstrated its ability to affect change in the fortunes of their subjects. Notably, *Serial*'s investigation into the murder of Hae Lee Min led to a retrial for Adnan Syed, Min's boyfriend who was tried and convicted for her murder. Just recently, Steven Avery of *Making a Murderer* fame won an appeal and will have his case re-examined in a Wisconsin state court (The Guardian, 2019). The abundance of similar examples has led some to claim that true crime has started to shift towards a genre of advocacy. Cruz speculates, "These long-percolating cultural shifts hint at what true crime's future could look like: less straight entertainment and more advocacy journalism, if not in style, then at least in consequence" (2015).

I am inclined to agree with Cruz that the shifting orientations in contemporary true crime reflect a parallel shifting in cultural attitudes. These last five years have found Americans in a strange cultural moment. The #blacklivesmatter movement has forced the issues of police brutality and mass incarceration back into the national conversation. The unsuccessful fight against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 re-opened many old wounds for Native Americans. The #metoo movement has revealed the pervasiveness of rape culture around the world. In the U.S., the rising right-wing reactionary movement against these civil resistance movements has found its ultimate spokesperson in Donald Trump. Given this social and political climate, many Americans have understandably become less confident in themselves, their neighbors, their leaders, and more importantly, their institutions. This mistrust has manifested itself in American cultural products. While it used to be that analyses of systemic injustice were limited to college classrooms and other pockets of the intelligentsia, now even our "mainstream" cultural products are beginning to engage with the political realities of race, sex, class, gender, and environment. Given true crime's chosen subject matter, the genre is a natural fit for such critical examinations, and

recent offerings such as Ava DuVernay's *When They See Us* suggest that true crime is increasingly moving in this direction. In short, the new true crime as advocacy journalism has emerged partly due to a critical consciousness *gone mainstream* in contemporary U.S. culture.

To be sure, these newer entries into the true crime canon are still generally recognizable as exactly that: true crime. They still rely on the old conventions: the classic whodunit narrative, the return to the scene of the crime, the cliffhanger, the courtroom procedural drama, and the dramatic re-enactment. But there has been an unmistakable shift in tone and purpose in the new true crime. The subjects have changed. "The result," Cruz concludes, "is a genre that's still indebted to decades-old conventions, but also one that has found renewed relevance and won a new generation of fans by going beyond the usual grisly sensationalism."

Of course, true crime hasn't always received such praise. In a 1991 essay, Jack Miles concluded that "most 'true crime' is so entirely without an agenda that there is little to discuss: There is only a questionable entertainment to promote" (p. 64). In his view, the genre serves no well-meaning purpose; it is pornographic, shameless entertainment that profits from victims' suffering, re-traumatizes secondary victims, or mythologizes the perpetrator, and that, often enough, manages to accomplish some combination of the above. True crime is no stranger to criticism or controversy, and it should come as no surprise that the current praise of true crime has been far from universal. Since the beginning of the true crime boom in the mid-2010s, we have seen a proliferation of think-pieces rearticulating for the modern consumer of these tales the moral and ethical dangers perceived to be inherent to the genre. These articles have tended to echo past criticisms of true crime. True crime sensationalizes tragedy. True crime teaches politics of fear and paranoia. Many have pointed out, as Miles did in 1991, the genre's "human cost," that is, its potential to re-harm those who were close to the victim of a crime. No matter how carefully researched or reported, they say, true crime can have unintended consequences for secondary victims, often due to reasons outside of the storyteller's control. This potential for additional harm is an even more pressing issue in our current true crime moment, when social and visual medias have fundamentally changed the ways that audiences can interact with the crime story and its subjects. As Houpt concludes, "[h]arm as a byproduct of entertainment may be the true cost of true crime." The journalist points to the negative impact that the buzz surrounding *Serial* had on Hae Lee Min's family as supporting evidence for this claim.[2] There are, of course, other examples. Another common criticism holds that true crime has a tendency to mythologize and sometimes even romanticize the perpetrators of horrific crimes. Even when the text's orientation towards the criminal is that of clear and unmistakable condemnation, readers can still misappropriate the text. One need only look at the cultural mythos built up around Charles Manson and The Family left by the many books that have been written about the subject, most notably *Helter Skelter*, to see this kind of reader-driven mythologizing at play.[3] Interestingly, many critics who claim woke ethics have repeated this critique of true crime. According to journalist Laura Bogart, the true crime story, particularly the one that is centered on the *serial* killer, tends to promote the trope of the "Broody White Male Anti-hero" at the same time that it diminishes the victims, typically women, but also members of the queer community and people of color. Such a focus on the perpetrator, Bogart adds, can "devalue the victims, and, more broadly, 'set a theme' that certain marginalized groups are 'disposable'" (The Week, 2018).

To some unquantifiable extent, I must concede that these critics have a point. Some true crime, even today, still peddles in the tired tropes and the old sensationalism. It can be opportunistic and exploitative, and there is always the potential to cause additional harm. In terms of representation, some true crime does, directly or indirectly, mythologize the murderer, romanticize the rapist, or both, often at the expense of the victim(s). For example, the tendency for writers and readers alike to promote the

2 In a 2015 post on r/serialpodcast, Hae Lee Min's brother blasted fans of *Serial*, writing, "When I found out there was a subreddit for this, I had to do AMA for reddit community. But sorry I won't be answering any questions because...TO ME ITS REAL LIFE. To you listeners, its another murder mystery, crime drama, another episode of CSI. You weren't there to see your mom crying every night, having a heart attck when she got the new that the body was found, and going to court almost everyday for a year seeing your mom weeping, crying, and fainting. You don't know what we went through. Especially to those who are demanding our family response and having a meetup... you guys are disgusting. SHame on you. I pray that you don't have to go through what we went through and have your story blasted to 5mil listeners."

3 I am reminded of a friend of mine from high school who years ago expressed their infatuation with Charles Manson after reading Helter Skelter. They loved Manson's songs (he was an aspiring musician) and affectionately called him "my baby."

"Broody White Male Antihero" at the expense of others can be seen in contemporary treatments of Ted Bundy. Yet, some writers of true crime have begun to find ways to avoid the ethical pitfalls and resist the problematic tropes that have turned many people against the genre. Some have done this by taking on historical crimes so that the relationship between subjects and spectators is distanced to some degree. Others have placed victims' experiences at the center of their stories, or, better, have let the victims tell their own stories. The result is a true crime that recognizes its troubled history and actively seeks to mitigate any potential harm that may be caused by the stories it investigates. In this objective the writers of true crime are not always successful, but since the genre is not going away anytime soon, any attempt at minimizing harm and resisting stereotypes is, in my view, certainly welcome.

Cruz and others (Rowen 2017) have identified the fact that true crime has shifted towards advocacy journalism by advocating for the wrongfully imprisoned and by so doing exposing flaws in the criminal justice system. I would take this argument one step further by suggesting that some of true crime's newer entries have even started to advocate for social justice. Here is the difference as I see it. True crime as advocacy text advocates for individuals wronged by the criminal justice system: the Adnan Syeds, Steven Averys, and Brendan Dasseys of the world. Conversely, true crime as social justice text advocates for marginalized groups of people, for entire communities who still continue to face cultural, legal, and economic injustice today. True crime as social justice text is therefore distinguished from the former in its focus on justice for *groups* rather than *individuals*. Accordingly, these true crime texts tend to focus on crimes rooted in racist or misogynistic ideologies. So, while I must concede that true crime has the potential to cause harm and contribute to problematic representations of both dominant and marginalized groups, I believe that such an argument is an unfair assessment of the genre as a whole, and I think that the promising trend towards "true crime as social justice text" supports my view.

To further my case that true crime has shifted towards a genre of social justice, this paper reviews four contemporary examples of what I call true injustice, an emerging subgenre of true crime that investigates the myriad individual, social, cultural, economic, and legal failings surrounding a specific crime or series of crimes. I am especially interested in works that deal with injustice against whole groups of people, what I refer to as true crime as social justice, since these texts are illustrative of the emerging social justice orientations that could become a defining feature of the new true crime. I look at three books, David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (2017), Timothy B. Tyson's *The Blood of Emmett Till* (2017), and Jon Krakauer's *Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town* (2015). I also consider one example from new media, Netflix's *Examen de Conciencia* (2018). In all of these texts, the specific crime (and in some cases, crimes) under investigation is mapped against a complex web of oppressive social, cultural, legal, and economic discourses and practices—in sum, a culture of violence—that, in effect, rationalizes acts of domestic terror against particular groups of people. *The Blood of Emmett Till* reexamines the infamous 1955 kidnapping and late-model lynching of a young black boy in Mississippi to reveal the violent workings of race in the late-Jim Crow American South. In *Killers of the Flower Moon*, the disappearance of a young Osage Indian woman and the later discovery of two bodies opens a chilling book-length investigation into the mass murder of at least twenty (and perhaps more than a hundred) wealthy Osage over oil money in 1920's Osage County, Oklahoma. In *Missoula*, Krakauer examines a recent spate of sex crimes that took place in a small university town in Montana, and though the book doesn't contextualize these crimes within a larger discussion about rape culture in the United States, I argue that it can still be read as a local case study of rape culture. *Examen*, a foreign language Netflix Original Documentary based in Spain, offers a devastating but necessary glimpse into the widespread culture of sexual abuse within the Roman Catholic Church. The effect of each of these texts is the same. In each of these examples, the authors use the true crime story to expose pervasive cultures of violence directed at marginalized groups of people.

For all the focus on mass injustice, however, these texts do not only tell narratives from the rhetorical position of victimhood. In the course of exposing the culture of violence surrounding a particular crime or series of criminal acts, the writers highlight individual and collective acts of bravery. They tell stories of resistance. We learn how Mammie Till Bradley's courage and political maneuvering during a time of terrible grief effectively

mobilized the Civil Rights movement. Nearly one hundred years after the Osage "Reign of Terror," we find that the Osage have managed to maintain a sense of tradition and community, almost as if in spite of the mass local and national conspiracy to erase them and their culture. Faced with fear, self-doubt, and a misogynistic culture that is always quicker to place blame on women rather than the accused, five women find the courage to confront their rapists and seek justice. A survivor joins others in breaking the silence about a history of mass sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Spain.

My reading of these texts will draw attention to the social justice orientations that are an emerging feature of the new true crime. True crime as social justice text maps the logics and legacies of violence and shows how people have resisted such violence. Of course, we must be careful, for not all true crime is created with the interests of social justice (or even individual advocacy) in mind. For this reason, I encourage consumers of the new true crime to be vigilant about the types of true crime they read, hear, or watch, for the simple reason that, like every genre, true crime is made up of the good, the bad, and the ugly.

CULTURES OF RACIST VIOLENCE: *THE BLOOD OF EMMETT TILL* AND *KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON*—The first two books I review in this paper both take up historical race crimes to examine cultures of racist violence in the United States. That is to say, both texts demonstrate how a combination of racist social, cultural, legal, and economic discursive practices resulted in a logic of violence that rationalized the murder of racially-marginalized members of society. In *The Blood of Emmett Till*, Tyson explores how deeply-rooted fears of racial integration across all scales of social life in the late-Jim Crow American South created an atmosphere of fear and violence that made it possible for two men to kidnap and murder a young black boy from Chicago and get away with it. In *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Grann traces the history of oppressive cultural, legal, and economic injustices against the Osage that led to the murder of at least twenty (and perhaps hundreds) of Osage Indians in 1920s Oklahoma. These texts illustrate true crime's ability to shift away from sensational tales of murder towards more critical examinations of a history of racial injustice in the United States. Furthermore, though both texts are historical, I argue that they function as social justice texts in that they ask us, directly and indirectly, to draw parallels between the violent histories they tell and the injustices of today.

The Blood of Emmett Till is nominally about the most notorious hate crime in American history, the kidnapping and late-model lynching of Emmett Till in 1955. The story is so well-known that it hardly needs retelling, but I'll describe it briefly. In 1955, Emmett Till, a young black boy from Chicago staying with family in Money, Mississippi, walks into a local market and allegedly makes a flirtatious comment to the store shopkeeper, a young white woman named Carolyn Bryant. Later, Roy Bryant, Carolyn's husband, hears of this violation of the race-sex taboo. Enraged by Till's affront, Bryant, his half-brother, and a group of unwilling black conspirators kidnap, torture, and eventually murder Emmett Till. Four days after the incident at the market, Till's body is found floating just above water in the Tallahatchie River. The book reads as true crime, containing all the markers of the genre, including a return to the scene of the crime, an exclusive interview with Carolyn Bryant, a dramatic retelling of the court trial, and later in the book, a textual re-enactment of the crime that feels like something out of an episode on Investigation Discovery. But the book is also an incisive examination of race relations in the United States at a critical juncture in the country's history.

Through a seamless blend of true crime storytelling and detailed social history, Tyson explains how a public fear of racial integration, rooted in the twin white supremacist ideologies of biological purity and cultural superiority, created a general atmosphere of racist violence against black Americans in the Jim Crow American South. These discourses were articulated and practiced through a network of racist representational, cultural, legal, and economic codes, such as hierarchical social rules and rituals, discriminatory housing practices, segregated schools, and miscegenation laws. Socially, African Americans were expected to behave a certain way around white people; in the unfortunate event that they stepped out line, they were often severely punished. Legally, black Americans in Mississippi were denied the vote, and their attempts to win the vote were actively suppressed through economic reprisals. When that didn't work, threats of physical violence soon followed. Discriminatory housing practices effectively relegated black Americans to unsafe,

unsanitary, and dangerous living conditions. They were denied equal employment opportunities. By mapping this culture of racist violence, Tyson ultimately shows his reader how inflammatory discourses of race worked in the 1950s American South to create social conditions that would come to justify the murder of a young black boy from Chicago. Despite the overwhelming evidence that Bryant and Milam were guilty of kidnapping and murdering Till, both men were acquitted by an all-white jury in September 1955. As Tyson explains, the jury was unwilling to convict the men "because a black boy had insulted a white woman, and therefore her kinsman could not be blamed for killing him.14" (180). It is therefore not an overstatement to say that a culture of racist violence in the late-Jim Crow American South quite literally justified the murder the Emmet Till.

In a similar blend of true crime and social history, *Killers of the Flower Moon* begins in 1921 with the disappearance of Anna Brown, a young Osage woman, from her home in Gray Horse, Oklahoma. A week later, the body of Charles Whitehorn, another local Osage, is found near town with a bullet hole between his eyes. Soon after, Anna Brown's body is finally discovered, and we learn that she, too, was the victim of homicide. David Grann takes up these two crimes as a starting point for examining what one federal agent involved with the ensuing case referred to as a "culture of killing" (308) in 1920's Osage Country and what became known in the intervening years as the "Osage Reign of Terror." In the years following the discovery of Brown and Whitehorn's bodies, tens, if not hundreds, of Osage would either be found murdered or would die on the reservation under mysterious circumstances. In the chapters that follow, Grann recounts how the newly created FBI's investigation into the Osage murders eventually uncovered a mass plot by white Americans to murder Osage Indians for the oil money tied to their headrights. To tell this story, Grann employs all the hallmarks of classic true crime, including the cat and mouse chase between law enforcement and criminals, the whodunit narrative, the chapter cliffhangers, and the courtroom drama. But Killers, as social justice text, is also a disturbing glimpse into the long history of exploitation of and violence against Native Americans in the United States.

The framing true crime narrative of Killers is complemented by a history of the Osage in the United States. When the Osage were forced out of their home in Kansas in the early 1870s, they decided to settle in what would later be named the State of Oklahoma, over lands which white Americans at the time believed to be resource dry. Later, the Osage, who had discovered several small oil deposits in the years following settlement, shrewdly negotiated mineral rights over their new land when coming to an agreement with the United States over the terms of allotment. The Allotment Act passed in 1906 granted every Osage member on the tribal roll a headright, which in turn granted them a share in this mineral trust. The act further stipulated that headrights could be inherited but not sold, and further, that inheritances could be passed down to both Osage and non-Osage persons. The reservation was later discovered to be sitting on top of some of the largest oil deposits in the United States, and the Osage became prosperous due to the country's insatiable thirst for oil. Leases were signed and royalties paid, and by the 1920s, the Osage were the richest people per capita in the United States.

Naturally, many white Americans could not fathom the idea of a "red millionaire" (7), and their growing resentment was expressed through a combination of racist cultural, legal, and economic discourses and practices ("Indian Business," as it was referred to by white Americans at the time) that in their total relations worked to undermine Osage wealth and self-determination. The press would regularly stoke white anxieties by telling wildly embroidered tales about the Osage's supposed excesses. Local business owners would sell Osage various goods and services at exorbitantly higher prices than their white counterparts. The worst of all these practices was the federally-imposed policy of guardianship, passed by the Congress in 1921, whereby any tribe member who was half or more Osage, regardless of age, sex, or social status, was placed under the economic guardianship of a prominent white neighbor. This paternalistic policy essentially made room for further economic exploitation. Grann describes an instance in which a guardian purchased a car for less than five hundred dollars and sold it back to his appointed Osage member for more than a thousand. And in the case that an Osage member died, their guardian would inherit the deceased's headright. Within such a pervasively racist social system, it was only a matter of time before some white Americans realized that the only thing standing between them and the Osage's oil money were the Osage. And it was in a culture that actively de-valued Osage lives that this con could turn

into a full-fledged conspiracy. Eventually, federal agents and local Osage involved in the investigation uncovered a mass plot, led by a loose network of white Americans including doctors, lawyers, and criminals-for-hire, to kill Osage Indians so that their guardians could inherit the headrights of the deceased.

CULTURES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE: *MISSOULA* AND *EXAMEN DE CONCIENCIA*—The following book and docuseries I cover in this paper take up sex crimes in the United States and abroad. In *Missoula*, Krakauer examines a series of campus rapes that occurred in just the last decade in the small university town of Missoula, Montana, home to the University of Montana and The Grizzlies, UM's beloved football team. *Examen de Conciencia* (Examination of Conscience) takes us to Spain, where numerous men tell their devastating stories of childhood sexual abuse at the hands of Catholic teachers and priests. Both *Missoula* and *Examen* reveal the various ways that individuals, local communities, and, more importantly, institutions, fail survivors of sexual violence through victim-blaming, lack of support, and active silencing. Furthermore, while both the book and the docuseries focus on localized instances of sexual violence, they directly and indirectly invite the reader to view these investigations as case studies of a wider global culture of rape.

Missoula is an informative, yet deeply disturbing, look into campus and acquaintance rape. Krakauer chronicles the experiences of five women before their rape as well as how they each deal with its aftermath: their previous relationship with the perpetrator; their feelings of fear, anxiety, and self-doubt after the event; their courageous decision to report their rapes and seek justice in either the university or criminal courts; and the university's, local community's and law enforcement's failures to adequately respond to their accusations of rape. The book employs many of the conventions of true crime but dispenses with others. For example, we are still audience to the courtroom dramas, interviews with involved persons, and textual re-enactments of the crime. However, because Krakauer chooses to believe his subjects, there is no need for the whodunit narrative.

One particularly horrifying aspect of rape culture that is addressed in the book is how local communities and institutions often fail victims of sexual violence by way of victim-blaming. Victim blaming refers to the tendency to assign partial or complete blame to the victim of sexual assault. Krakauer describes numerous instances of victim-blaming in the public's response to accusations of rape and subsequent arrests. For example, when one of The Grizzlies' star players, Beau Donaldson, is arrested for the rape of one of the five women Krakauer follows, one internet forum member is quoted as saying: "First off, chicks exaggerate on rape. Second off, she could sucked his dick and still got rape just because she said she didn't want it later on … And a lot of people lie" (p. 54). Not only does the forum member assign partial blame for the rape on the accuser ("she could sucked his dick and still got raped because she said she didn't want it later on"), but they also perpetuate the "myth of false accusation" ("chicks exaggerate rape … a lot of people lie"). As Krakauer notes, studies show that only 2% to 5% of victims make false accusations. If we accept this statistic, that means that 95–98% of the time, the accusers are telling the truth. Yet, as Krakauer shows, local community members and institutions are more likely to side with the accused. This is far from the only instance of victim-blaming and victim-doubting cited in the book.

Examen de Conciencia is a three-part docuseries that brings to light decades (if not centuries) of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Spain. This is the framing narrative: in the first episode, we are introduced to survivor and activist Miguel Hurtado, who is contemplating going public about the sexual abuse he endured when he was a young boy in the church. In a moving monologue at the end of the episode, he lets his audience know that he has decided to go public. The second episode follows Hurtado as he mentally and emotionally prepares for the difficult road ahead. To prepare, Hurtado meets with several other survivors who have gone public to hear about their experience. Finally, in the third episode, Hurtado tells his story. The whole series, we discover, is the public accusation. And this is only the framing narrative. Hurtado's narrative is interspersed with social history and other survivor narratives. There is even a deeply unsettling interview with a confessed abuser.

The series illustrates how communities and local institutions fail to support survivors who have come forward to report sexual abuse. The series also shows how the church and its supporters go through great pains to actively silence accusers through such practices as bribery, threat, and non-participation. At the outset of episode one, Hurtado reflects:

> And one thing I've really noticed is the lack of support from the Catholic Church. From government institutions. And, naturally, I wonder: if victims knew what was going to happen, would they have thought twice and decided not to speak out? Or, despite all the difficulties, is it still worth it?

This lack of support operates in several ways. When victims come forward to report their abuse, the church's typical response has been to deal with the offense internally. In most cases, this means that the accused are suspended for a period of time and/or relocated to another parish. Because of the church's relative autonomy, local governments rarely get involved. Even the local community rallies to protect the church. In the first episode, one of the survivors describes how, when he came forward publicly to accuse a church schoolteacher of abuse, members of the PTA descended upon the church and formed a circle around the building to signal their support for the teacher and church.

STORIES OF RESISTANCE—These texts deal with horrific crimes. In some cases, these crimes have been committed by people with magnetic personalities. Easy as it would be for the authors to focus on the perpetrators or narrate from positions of victimhood, the books, in fact, do the opposite: they use the true crime story to champion victims and tell stories of hope and resistance. These stories, I argue, function as social justice texts insofar that they illustrate how marginalized groups have resisted individual, social, cultural, legal, and economic oppression in the recent or not-so-distant past.

These acts of resistance can be momentous in their effects. In *The Blood of Emmett Till*, Tyson makes clear that Mamie Bradley was not only brave but politically astute in her response to her son's murder. Tyson cites Mamie's decision to reach out to black newspapers upon first hearing that Emmett was missing as evidence for this claim. About Mamie's decision to involve the black press, Tyson writes:

> Thanks to Mamie, Chicago's newspapers, radio, and television were already starting to cover the lynching. A TV news bulletin even interrupted I Love Lucy to report the discovery of the body. Now word spread that Emmett Till's body was coming home to Chicago. Mamie now envisioned God's purpose for her life—and for her son's life: "I took the privacy of my grief and turned it into a public issue, a political issue, one which set in motion the dynamic force what ultimately led to a generation of social and legal progress for this country."32 Unlike any of the white newspapers, soon after Till's lynching the Pittsburgh Courier predicted that his mother's "agonized cry" might well become "the opening gun in a war on Dixie, which can reverberate around the world."33 Activists across the country hoped and believed that this tragedy might be the wellspring of positive change. Mamie had ensured that to her mother's cry would now be added the mute accusation of Emmett's body.
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> 66

Tyson then shows how Mamie Till Bradley's subsequent decision to hold a public, open-casket funeral, her eloquent and composed testimony during the ensuing trial, and her activism in the years following the acquittal, forced the entire nation to confront the horrors of Jim Crow racism and effectively mobilized the Civil Rights Movement.

These acts of resistance can be small and personal. Miguel reflects on his own recovery at the end of episode one of *Examen*:

> Over the years, I've been through significant personal development. At first, I was a victim. My attitude was passive. I'd lost control over my life. And I think that I started to become a survivor when I was able to accept my experience and go to therapy. And, finally, I've taken the next step of becoming an activist.
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> S1:E1 (49:45–50:15)

Hurtado's personal journey from victim to survivor and finally to activist suggests that confronting one's trauma is itself an act of resistance. Seeking help is often the first step. Krakauer describes a similar case to make this point at the end of his book: "Counseling from a skilled therapist can certainly help. And so can speaking the truth about the unspeakable nature of the harm. By such means, Laura Summers managed to regain her equilibrium and find a measure of peace" (380).

In the third and final part of *Killers of the Flower Moon*, Grann recounts his two visits to the Osage Reservation in

2013 and 2015. While there, he discovered that the Osage people have managed, in small ways, to maintain a sense of community and hold onto their cultural traditions, despite the mass conspiracy one hundred years ago to erase them and their culture in the pursuit of riches. Grann describes his experience attending one of the Osages' ceremonial dances, which are held over several weekends every June:

> These dances—which take place, at different times, in Hominy, Pawhuska, and Gray Horse, three areas where the Osage first settled when they came to the reservation, in the 1870s—help preserve fading traditions and bind the community together.
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> 265

Other moments during Grann's trip reveal the Osage's resilience. He visits the Osage Nation Museum in Pawhuska, where he finds members of the Osage working to keep the history of their people from being forgotten. While driving to Gray Horse, Grann recalls his surprise at seeing bison—which had been systematically exterminated by white Americans in the early 20th century to deprive Native Americans of one of their main food and craft resources—roaming the plains. Grann later learns that bison had been reintroduced by conservationists some years earlier and were now once again under Osage stewardship.

At another level, these texts directly or indirectly encourage us to trace the logics and legacies of violence through history and/or across locations. For example, Blood directly invites readers to draw connections between the violent history it tells and the injustices many black Americans face today. Racist violence against blacks didn't cease to exist then, despite all the social and political gains made by the Civil Rights movement. At the outset of *The Blood of Emmett Till*, Tyson recalls a similar story from his own past of racially-motivated murder in the South, fifteen years after the shocking events of 1955:

> I knew the painful territory well because when I was eleven years old in a small tobacco market town of Oxford, North Carolina, a friend's father and brothers beat and shot a young black man to death. His name was Henry Marrow, and the events leading up to his death had something in common with Till's.
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> 2

This story serves as the prelude to a later discussion in the book about the inter-generationality of violence against black men in the United States, one that Tyson traces from the time of Emmett Till to the current day. Cultures of racist violence against black people persist today in both overt and subtle forms. Later, in a chapter titled, "The Children of Emmett Till," Tyson encourages his readers to think about how, as he puts it, "America is still killing Emmett Till" (214). He mentions the 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri by a white police officer, the 2014 slaughter of nine churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina by a white supremacist, and the lesser known murder of James Craig in 2011, who was beaten and killed by a group of suburban white teenagers in Jackson, Mississippi, as examples of the overt brutality still experienced by black people today in service of white supremacy. He also urges us to consider the "less direct," that is to say, the systemic ways that America is still killing Emmett Till through mass incarceration, spatial and environmental racism, and the war on drugs. The book thus functions as a social justice text in that it asks readers to consider how the inequalities experienced by black communities today are rooted in the injustices of the past. It is a brutal lesson in history about the de-valuing of black lives—black lives have never mattered, and still don't.

Likewise, albeit indirectly, *Killers of the Flower Moon* invites readers to draw parallels between the long history of exploitation of Native American land and resources described in the book and the injustices still faced by Native Americans today in the pursuit of capitalist profit. On his 2015 visit to Oklahoma, Grann recounts local Osages' dismay upon finding out that windmill turbines had been erected near Pawhuska. He writes:

> More than a hundred years after oil was discovered in Osage territory, a new revolutionary source of energy was transforming the region. But this time the Osage viewed it as a threat to their underground reservation. "Did you see them? Red Corn said of the turbines, when I returned. "This company came in here and put them up without out permission."
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A subsequent lawsuit was filed by the federal government on behalf of the Osage claiming that the windmills violated the terms of 1906 Allotment Act, but the

courts eventually sided with the energy conglomerate financing the project, citing the fact that the company was not mining underground resources owned by the Osage and therefore was not in violation of the act. This story serves to illustrate the fact that Native Americans are still being exploited today in the interests of "big energy" capitalism.

Similarly, though both *Missoula* and *Examen* focus on localized instances of sexual violence, they directly and indirectly invite readers to view these as case studies of a wider culture of rape. In the first chapter of *Missoula*, Krakauer warns readers about the dangers of viewing *Missoula*, which received the unfortunate and misleading title as the "Rape Capital of America," as an outlier in the United States. Krakauer writes that what happened in Missoula is symptomatic of a larger rape culture in American society:

> In fact, 80 rapes over the course of three years appears to be "on par with national averages for college towns of Missoula's size," as Baker mentioned in her piece. According to FBI's latest statistics, there were an average of 26.8 "forcible rapes" reported in American cities the size of Missoula in 2012—which works out to be 80.4 rapes over three years. In other words, the number of sexual assaults in Missoula might sound alarming, but if the FBI figures are accurate, it's actually commonplace. Rape, it turns out, occurs with appalling frequency in the United States.
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> 10

Likewise, at several points throughout the series, *Examen* invites readers to acknowledge child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church as a widespread and structural problem. As one survivor puts it:

> In Spain, we need a help network of abused people as well as better institutional help and that society opens its eyes and see that this problem is real, that some people suffer, that it's not isolated, it's structural, that it happens to many people statistically, and nothing is being done to stop it.
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> (S1:E2: 19:35–19:13)

While both *Missoula* and *Examen* both focus on local cases of sexual violence, they continually advise their audiences to consider sexual violence as a widespread and structural problem around the world.

CONCLUSION: LOCATING KAIROS IN THE NEW TRUE CRIME—The timeliness of these books cannot be overstated. Even when historical in content, these books deal with issues that are still relevant in contemporary U.S. society. People of color still face overt and subtle forms of racism on a daily basis. Indigenous peoples of North America are still being exploited and culturally erased in the interests of big oil. Rape culture is alive and well, not only on campuses and churches around the world, but in Hollywood and Washington D.C., too. Indeed, this is why the trend towards social justice advocacy in contemporary true crime is such a welcome development. Given both its chosen subject matter and its widespread appeal in contemporary society, the true crime genre is at a unique vantage point from which to tell stories of the injustices that have been and are still faced by our most marginalized communities. Yet, all too often, true crime has reaffirmed conservative notions of justice, promoted problematic tropes, and neglected people of color and other marginalized communities in the stories they tell.

This all points to the importance of locating what rhetoricians would call the kairos of true crime. Kairos is an ancient Greek rhetorical term that refers to the "timeliness" or "appropriateness" of a rhetorical argument. It asks of a piece of rhetoric: why now? For me, consideration of kairos is a twofold project that aims to determine both a writerly as well as a readerly kairos. In other words, when I say that consumers of true crime should try to locate the kairos of true crime, what I mean is that consumers of true crime should ask themselves, first, why the book they are reading was written when it was written (What was the writer's kairos for writing about this crime?), and, second, why they are reading it right now (What is my kairos as a reading about this crime?). Through such reflection, readers can avoid (or at least critically approach) the true crime that profits from suffering and promotes questionable tropes. In other words, locating the kairos of true crime can help readers create the ethical, moral, and political contexts for consuming true crime.

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